

5. (Amended) A linkage member as set forth in claim 1 wherein said predetermined weakened portion has a cross-sectional configuration that is eccentric to said axis by a distance that is greater than the maximum bending amount of said shank portion of said ball stud.

6. (Amended) A linkage member as set forth in claim 5 wherein said shank portion of said ball stud has a circular cross-sectional configuration centered on said axis and said predetermined weakened portion has a circular cross-sectional configuration.

7. (Amended) A linkage member as set forth in claim 6 wherein said shank portion of said ball stud has a diameter in the range of from about 12 millimeters to about 21 millimeters, said predetermined weakened portion has a diameter in the range of from about 8 millimeters to about 18 millimeters, and said predetermined weakened portion is eccentric to said axis by an amount in the range of from about 0.1 millimeters to about 0.5 millimeters.

8. (Amended) A linkage member as set forth in claim 7 wherein said shank portion of said ball stud has a diameter of 15.5 millimeters, said predetermined weakened portion has a diameter of 12.5 millimeters, and said predetermined weakened portion is eccentric to said axis by about 0.15 to 0.3 millimeters.

9. (Amended) A linkage member as set forth in claim 3 wherein said predetermined weakened portion is eccentric to said axis by an amount equal to about 1% to about 3% of the diameter of said shank portion.

10. (Amended) A vehicle steering linkage member comprising:

a socket; and

a stud having a ball end portion received in said socket and supported for pivotal movement relative to said socket, said stud having a shank portion projecting from said socket, said shank portion being centered on said axis and having one or more bent areas at which said shank portion is bent off said axis;

said shank portion of said ball stud including a predetermined weakened portion that is eccentric to said axis.

11. (Amended) A linkage member as set forth in claim 10 wherein the amount of eccentricity of said predetermined weakened portion is greater than the amount by which said one or more bent areas of said shank portion are bent off said axis.

12. (Amended) A linkage member as set forth in claim 11 wherein said shank portion of said ball stud has a circular cross-sectional configuration centered on said axis and said predetermined weakened portion has a circular cross-sectional configuration that is eccentric to said axis.

13. (Amended) A linkage member as set forth in claim 12 wherein said predetermined weakened portion is eccentric to said axis by an amount equal to about 1% to about 3% of the diameter of said shank portion.

14. (Amended) A linkage member as set forth in claim 10 wherein said predetermined weakened portion buckles under a predetermined amount of force.

15. (Amended) A vehicle steering linkage member comprising:

a socket; and

a stud having a ball end portion received in said socket and supported for pivotal movement relative to said socket, said stud having a longitudinal axis, said stud having a shank portion projecting from said socket and centered on said axis;

said shank portion of said ball stud including a predetermined weakened portion, said predetermined weakened portion having a cross-sectional configuration that is not centered on said axis.

16. (Amended) A linkage member as set forth in claim 15 wherein said shank portion of said ball stud has a circular cross-sectional configuration centered on said axis and said predetermined weakened portion has a circular cross-sectional configuration that is eccentric to said axis.

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17. (Amended) A linkage member as set forth in claim 15 wherein said predetermined weakened portion buckles under a predetermined amount of force.

Please add the following claims:

18. A linkage member comprising:
a shank having a longitudinal axis;
said shank including a relief area at a predetermined location along said longitudinal axis, said shank buckling at said relief area under a predetermined amount of axially applied force,
said shank at said relief area having a cross-sectional configuration that is not centered on said axis.

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19. A linkage member as set forth in claim 18 wherein said shank has a circular cross-sectional configuration and said shank at said relief area has a circular cross-sectional configuration that is not centered on said axis.

20. A linkage member as set forth in claim 18 wherein said shank at said relief area has a cross-sectional configuration that is eccentric to said longitudinal axis by a distance that is greater than any other eccentric portion of said shank.

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21. A linkage member as set forth in claim 20 wherein said shank has a diameter in the range of from about 12 millimeters to about 21 millimeters, said shank at said relief area has a diameter in the range of from about 8 millimeters to about 18 millimeters, and said shank at said relief area is eccentric to said axis by an amount in the range of from 0.1 millimeters to 0.3 millimeters.